

WHEN BEAUTY COMPETITIONS LEAD TO UGLINESS

Female beauty and religion are undergoing a tug-of-war in Malaysia. While some beauty contest winners are dissolving in tears of joy, others are being tossed out of high school.

Newspaper pictures of contest winners wearing swimsuits look markedly out of place in predominantly Muslim Malaysia. But with a mixed population of Malays (60 percent), Chinese (30 percent) and Indians (eight percent), Malaysia promotes itself as a tolerant, multicultural nation and so far beauty contests have survived.

Organisers of such contests increasingly insist it takes more than a pretty face to win. Michelle Chong, 23, named Miss Chicago in a contest run by a local advertising agency last week, was asked questions on pollution, road bullies and abandoned babies—all key local issues.

"We do not want to create a new generation of beauty queens who know nothing about the issues pertaining to their own country," organiser Catherine Moir-Bussy said.

But participation in beauty contests is not being tolerated by school officials.

Seventeen-year-old student Fahyu Hanim Ahmad was warned after emerging as a finalist in the Miss Teen Malaysia/International pageant that she could be expelled from school. But she persisted and ended up with the title along with M\$500 (HK\$1,500), a M\$2,500 scholarship for further studies and a return air ticket to Costa Rica for the international pageant.

C I P S

The Form Five pupil was escorted home from school by four teachers, one of whom handed an expulsion letter to her father. But she will be able to take her final exams in November.

Education Minister Najib Tun Razak said the ministry would no longer let students enter beauty contests because of "possible adverse effects".

Source: South China Morning Post, 7 August 1996

CHAD: FATWA AGAINST ZARA AND HER PRESENT CONDITION

A fatwa (death penalty) was pronounced against a young female film producer by the Mufti of N'Djamena after her film "Feminine Dilemma" was shown on public television. Her film, which was aimed at raising awareness about female genital mutilation (FGM) in Chad, showed parts of the operation on a young girl and this brought the wrath of the most influential Muslim leader in N'Djamena.

The Inter-African Committee (IAC) along with many other associations and individuals sent letters asking for the decision to be reconsidered. A reply has been received from the government which stated that no measures are being taken against Zara and that the government has nothing against her. Recently, an association known as "Women living under Muslim laws" sent us excerpts of a letter it received from Zara in which she stated the following:

"If you hadn't stepped in, there would have been no reaction, and God knows what would have happened to me by now..."

"Your call for action led the President of the Republic to tell the Imam to calm down and forget this case... People's attitude has improved a lot, but there are still suspicious looks..."

"The situation is now calm. The hardest is past. I have stopped taking (security) precautions and am trying to regain confidence..."

"It is time to say thank you to all the people who helped... I am still receiving support letters."

Source: Inter-African Committee Newsletter No. 19, June 1996

BELGIUM GRIEVES DEATH OF 2 CHILD SEX VICTIMS

LIEGE, Belgium (Reuter)—Silent crowds began gathering in this eastern Belgian town ahead of the funeral of two 8-year-old girls who died while in the hands of a convicted child sex offender.

Melissa Russo and Julie Lejeune were buried after an emotional memorial service in the Saint Martin basilica in their hometown of Liege which was televised live across a shocked nation.

Up to 100,000 people are expected to attend the service which will be held after a private commemorative ceremony for the close relatives of the two friends. The burial of the two white coffins with the girls' remains will be private too.

Those who will not be able to enter the church can follow the service on a large video screen outside.

Source: Philippine Daily Inquirer, 23 August 1996

COUPLE SLAIN FOR BEING HOMOSEXUALS

MEDFORD, Oregon—A man accused of killing a lesbian

